

Tree Planting, Maintenance and Removal Regulations for the City of Santa Barbara

Since 1981, Santa Barbara has been designated as a "Tree City USA" by the National Arbor Day Foundation. The award is given in recognition of efforts to plant, care for, and properly manage City trees, collectively referred to as Santa Barbara's urban forest. During the past 100 years, thousands of interesting and unusual trees from many parts of the world have been planted along our streets, in public parks, and by private property owners. In an effort to preserve, maintain, and when necessary replace these trees, the City of Santa Barbara has adopted two ordinances concerning trees and other plants growing in parkways along City streets and in front yards of private properties within the City of Santa Barbara.

This pamphlet has been prepared to inform Santa Barbara citizens of the City Tree Ordinances and regulations administered by the City Parks & Recreation Department relating to parkway plantings and front yard trees.

In the following pages we have answered the most frequently asked questions we receive concerning these trees and plantings in the hope that this will inform you of the appropriate action to take when confronted with a problem concerning trees in Santa Barbara.

1. What constitutes a parkway tree in Santa Barbara?

A parkway tree is a tree planted within the area between the sidewalk and the curb, or within 6 feet of the curb in most parts of the community. In order to be considered a parkway tree, the tree must have been planted, or caused to be planted, by the City.

2. Who owns the parkway trees and trees in public areas?

The trees are public property and are under the jurisdiction of the City Parks & Recreation Department.

3. Who has the responsibility for planting, maintenance, and removal of parkway trees?

The Parks & Recreation Department. The adjacent property owner has the responsibility for the maintenance of the ground cover plantings and shrubbery in the parkway.

4. Who is responsible for watering the street trees in the parkway and keeping the strips free of weeds and unsafe objects?

In residential areas, the adjacent property owner is responsible. The City waters trees and maintains treewells in commercial areas, and newly planted trees in residential areas are given supplemental water during the first 3-4 years to augment the watering efforts of adjacent property owners.

5. What should I do if the parkway tree in front of my home needs attention?

Contact the Parks & Recreation Department Office (Phone 564-5433). The tree will be examined by the City Arborist or Street Tree Inspector and its maintenance requirements determined. If the tree is not presenting an immediate hazard it will be placed on the preventive maintenance schedule for parkway trees. Immediate hazards will be addressed within 24 hours.

6. What are the restrictions that protect parkway trees from injury?

It is unlawful for any person to injure or destroy any parkway tree or trees in public areas by any means, including, but not limited to the following:

a. Trimming off or pruning the branches of any City tree without first obtaining a permit from the Parks & Recreation Department.

b. Constructing a concrete, asphalt, brick, or gravel sidewalk or otherwise filling up the ground area around any tree so as to shut off air or water from its roots. Any person desiring to place a "non-living ground cover" within the parkway strip must first obtain a written permit from the Parks & Recreation Department and Public Works Department. (See #8)

c. Piling building equipment, material, or other substance around any tree so as to cause injury.

d. Pouring any harmful substance on or around any tree, or on the surrounding ground, lawn, or sidewalk.

e. Posting any sign, poster, notice, or other object on any tree, tree stake or guard, or by fastening any guy wire, cable, rope, nails, screws, or other device to any tree, tree stake or guard.

7. I want the parkway tree in front of my home removed. What should I do?

Submit a written request for tree removal to the Parks Commission, P.O. Box 1990, Santa Barbara, CA 93102. The Arborist and Street Tree Advisory Committee will examine the situation and formulate a recommendation on the request. The request and recommendations are then presented to the Board of Park Commissioners, who act on recommendations to approve or deny the removal request. Generally, a tree is recommended for removal only if it is dead, diseased, a threat to public safety, or can no longer be maintained in a healthy, safe, and attractive condition by the City.

8. I would like to have a parkway tree planted in front of my home. What should I do?

We encourage property owners to be involved with the planting of their own parkway trees. Please call 564-5433, between 8am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, for further information. Please do not plant any vegetation other than grass or ground covers that will attain a maximum height of more than 8 inches in parkway without contacting the City Parks & Recreation Department for a permit to do so.

9. Why is it necessary for the Parks & Recreation Department to decide what types of trees to plant and where to plant them?

The Parks & Recreation Department follows a Master Plan to create an organized, properly spaced planting with desirable tree species. The plan is also designed to effectively manage the maintenance costs associated with parkway trees.

10. What other trees are under the jurisdiction of the City of Santa Barbara?

- Historic or specimen trees
- Trees located within the minimum front yard setback area of a property. To find out the minimum front yard setback for your property, contact the Planning Division's Planning and Zoning Counter (630 Garden Street, 564-5578).
- Trees identified on an approved landscape plan that is a component of a development application approved by the City Council, Planning Commission, Architectural Board of Review, or Historic Landmarks Commission.

11. What is considered to be an 'historic' or 'specimen' tree?

- 'Historic tree' is a tree that has been found by the Board of Park Commissioners and/or the Historic Landmarks Commission to be a tree of notable historic interest because of its age, type, or historic association.
- 'Specimen tree' is a tree that has been designated by the Board of Park Commissioners to be of high value because of its type, size, age, and rarity.

A list of designated 'historic' and 'specimen' trees can be obtained from the Arborist.

12. Do I need a City permit or review to remove a tree from my property? Yes, under these conditions:

- If the tree is a 'historic' or 'specimen' tree, you must first submit a completed application to the Parks and Recreation Department and obtain approval for the tree removal from the Park Commission.
- If the tree is located within the minimum front yard setback area of a property, you must first submit a completed application to the Parks and Recreation Department and obtain approval for the tree removal from the Park Commission.
- If the tree is identified on a required landscape plan that is a component of a development application approved by the City Council, Planning Commission, Architectural Board of Review, or Historic Landmarks Commission, the required landscape plan must first be amended by the appropriate decision-making body. Further information can be obtained at the Planning Division's Planning and Zoning Counter (630 Garden Street, 564-5578).

13. When can a property owner lawfully remove a tree on private property?

- When the tree is outside of the minimum front yard setback area and is not identified on a required landscape plan that is a component of a development application approved by the City Council, Planning Commission, Architectural Board of Review, or Historic Landmarks Commission.
- When the tree has a trunk diameter less than 4" at a point measured 24" above the ground and is not identified on a required landscape plan that is a component of a development application approved by the City Council, Planning Commission, Architectural Board of Review, or Historic Landmarks Commission.
- The tree is dead or diseased and its condition is a present danger to persons, property, or to healthy trees nearby. Contact the Parks Division so the City Arborist or Street Tree Inspector can verify the condition of your tree prior to removal.

14. When is a permit required for tree removal within the setback?

A permit is required when a tree is designated as an 'historic' or 'specimen' tree or when none of the conditions in Question #13 apply to your tree.

15. Who should be notified if the roots from a parkway tree are causing damage to sidewalk, curbing, or pavement?

The City Public Works Department, Street Division (564-5411) will examine and repair the damage to sidewalk, curbing, or pavement caused by parkway trees. The Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for pruning parkway tree roots and coordinating efforts to respond to public service requests related to root problems with the Street Division.

16. What should I do if the plumber says that he suspects the parkway tree is causing my sewer to back up?

Call 546-5433 and notify the Parks & Recreation Department. We may want to inspect the tree and make specific recommendations for dealing with the problem. If repairs other than rotary derooting must be made, the City Public Works Department must then be notified of the problem to determine if the blockage is in the street sewer main or the private lateral line from your property to the main line. (Call 564-5413)

17. What must a property owner do to prevent hazards or obstructions caused by vegetation on his property?

If your property is adjacent to, or fronts on streets or other public areas, you must maintain trees, hedges, and other vegetation on your property so they do not touch or obstruct people or vehicles using the public areas or streets. Private trees cannot block passage and create difficult or dangerous conditions such as obscured traffic visibility at driveways or intersections, or endanger the public due to possible falling or breakage of trees or branches. Public reports of any pedestrian or traffic visibility hazards caused by vegetation on private property, or within any street right-of-way should be reported to the Transportation Division of the Public Works Department (564-5385).

18. Who do I call if an emergency develops with a parkway tree from 4pm to 8am, Monday through Friday, and on weekends?

Emergency calls for parkway trees during times listed above should go to 963-4286. Call 564-5433 for response between 8am and 4pm, weekdays.